



FEMA

Disaster News

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NOTE TO EDITOR:

You can help disaster victims by announcing or publishing the toll-free application number, 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or TTY 1-800-462-7585, as often as possible.

USE CARE WHEN HIRING CONTRACTORS

And Ask for Official ID When Showing Damage to Inspectors

MADISON, WI — If you were affected by the severe storms and flooding that began May 19 you should be aware that some unscrupulous contractors might try to take advantage of you.

“If you have disaster-related damages, I urge you to be very careful when contracting for repairs,” Ron Sherman, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) coordinating officer said. “I do not want you to become a victim a second time.”

Disaster officials caution residents not to sign contracts or make down payments without first receiving written estimates from contractors, and to avoid offers which seem too good to refuse. People should ask for references and check with relatives or friends before deciding which contractor to choose.

“Be especially alert for door-to-door solicitors who ask for large cash deposits or entire payments in advance,” Ed Gleason, Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) administrator, said. “Sometimes the work is never performed or the down payment is never returned.”

Residents may be able to check with local permit officials, builder associations, and the Better Business Bureau if they have questions about specific contractors. Gleason suggests that disaster victims call the Consumer Protection Hotline of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection at 1-800-422-7128 if they have concerns about people who are representing themselves as contractors.

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Disaster recovery officials also advise disaster victims that loss verifiers and damage inspectors are in the affected areas. FEMA schedules inspections to verify losses within a few days after residents have filed applications. The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) will also inspect an applicant's damages, after the SBA has received a completed loan application. Inspectors carry official photo identification and do not charge anything for this service.

“Applicants should ask for identification from anyone identifying themselves as damage inspectors,” Sherman said. “And if someone posing as a federal employee or federal contractor attempts to collect money for their help, report the person and their vehicle number to your local police department.”

A FEMA inspector first examines any structural damage to your house, then assesses damage to appliances, such as the washer, dryer, refrigerator and stove. The inspector also reports serious needs, such as lost or damaged clothing. Homeowners should identify all known damages and tell the inspector if they have a septic system or a well.

For determining eligibility, property owners should be able to show proof of ownership and occupancy to the inspector, and residents will be asked to show identification as well. Renters also need to show proof of occupancy. If insurance papers are available, residents should show them to the inspector.

“You must first apply for disaster assistance before inspectors will view your damaged property,” Sherman said. “If you sustained damage and have not yet applied, please call the FEMA toll-free number **1-800-621-FEMA (3362)**. Those with hearing or speech impairment should call **TTY 1-800-462-7585**. Both lines are open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday.”

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's continuing mission within the new department is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains first responders, and manages Citizen Corps, the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

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